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Using Virtual Immersion Therapy to teach offenders with intellectual and other developmental disabilities social skills: a modelling study

Archibald, S.J. and Langdon, P.E.

Aims: The aim of the study was to model Virtual Immersion Therapy (VIT) as a paradigm to teach social skills to offenders with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

Method: Using a single-case multiple baseline design, 12 men detained in hospital because of criminal offending behaviour were invited to take part in this study. Participants were randomly allocated to either a one, two or three-week baseline condition, followed by either one or two sessions of training, followed by one, two or three-weeks of follow-up. Participants completed measures of empathy, social problem solving and emotion recognition before, during and after the intervention. The primary outcome was the Facial Expression Coding System (FACES).

Results: Overall, emotion recognition, the quality of verbal responses, and social problem solving skills improved following intervention, but this was not the case for all 12 participants. For some participants, gains were not maintained at follow-up.

Conclusion: The results indicate that a novel VIT paradigm may lead to significant improvements in social skills for some men with intellectual and other developmental disabilities who have a history of criminal offending behaviours.